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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 OPR-02 MMO-01
SY-05 OC-06 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 /080 W
----------261800Z 127789 /53
O R 261720Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4190
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 6729

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IT
SUBJECT: ITALIAN ASSESSMENT OF ETHIOPIAN MOTIVES BEHIND CONSULAR CLOSURES

REF: A. ROME 6683, B. STATE 092304

1. IN EXPLORING WITH MFA THE ITALIAN REACTION TO CONSULAR CLOSURES, A SUBSTANTIAL CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN ERITREA EMERGED. EPMG NOTE REQUIRING CLOSURE OF ITALIAN CONGEN IN ASMARA INCLUDED NO RATIONALE FOR THE MOVE, NOR DID ANY REASON SURFACE IN AMBASSADOR GUIDI'S MEETING WITH EPMG, FON MIN, ACCORDING TO A WELL-INFORMED MFA SOURCE.

2. SOURCE, HOWEVER, SAID THAT EPMG ACTION WAS CONSISTENT WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER (UNSPECIFIED) INDICATORS WHICH MIGHT PRESAGE A NEW AND MAJOR MOVE BY ADDIS ON THE ERITREANS. A NEW "RED MARCH", INVOLVING ARMED CITY
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DWELLERS AS WELL AS THE PEASANTRY, WOULD SEEM A LOGICAL FIRST MOVE, ONE LEADING TO A MAJOR MILITARY EFFORT AGAINST THE SECESSIONSISTS. GIVEN THE STATE OF TENSION WHICH ALREADY EXISTS (EXEMPLIFIED BY RECENT SEVERE HARASSEMENT OF ITALIANS RESIDENT NEAR KAREN), A RENEWED STATE OF GENERAL CONFLICT WOULD LIKELY INVOLVE THE FOREIGN COMMUNITIES WITH CONSIDERABLE BLOOD-

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SHED INVOLVED. ITALY WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO PROTECT
ITS PEOPLE IN ERITREA, PARTICULARLY INTHE ABSENCE OF
ON-THE-SPOT CONSULAR REPRESENTATION.

3. EMBASSY HAS FIRST-HAND INFORMATION THAT FONMIN
FORLANI ISSUED INSTRUCTIONS THIS MORNING THAT ITALIAN
CIVILIANS IN ERITREA BE "ENCOURAGED" (PRESUMABLY DIS-
CREETLY) TO LEAVE PROMPTLY. IN DOING SO, HOWEVER, HE
OPINED THAT NOT MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HUNDRED ARE LIKELY
TO RESPOND, AND DIRECTED THAT GOI EVACUATION PLANNING
FOCUS ON THAT NUMBER. HE ALSO TOLD MFA TO COORDINATE WITH
MINISTRY OF DEFENSE TO DETERMINE WHETHER MILITARY AIR
EVACUATION MIGHT BE NEEDED AND, IF SO, WHETHER ITALIAN AF
PLANES COULD USE ASMARA AIRPORT.

4. SENIOR MFA OFFICER WHO PROVIDED PART OF FOREGOING
REQUESTED DEPARTMENT'S OR EMBASSY ADDIS' LATEST ASSESS-
MENT OF TRENDS IN ETHIOPIA, PARTICULARLY AS THEY BEAR ON
POSSIBLE RENEWAL OF MAJOR FIGHTING. ACTION REQUESTED:
DEPARTMENT'S ASSENT TO OUR DRAWING ON REF. B(OR SUCH
OTHER MATERIAL AS MAY BE MADE AVAILABLE) TO RESPOND
TO ABOVE REQUEST AND TO STIMULATE FURTHER EXCHANGES
OF VIEWS ON THE HORN, AN AREA IN WHICH ITALY STILL
HAS SUBJSTANTIAL ASSETS AND INTERESTS.
GARDNER

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